Old Skool Games

Bringing the gaming past to the present

HEY DUDES THANKS.

FOR RESCUING ME.

LET'S GO FOR

A BURGER....

HA! HA! HA! HA!

Featured Review
Bad Dudes Vs Dragon Ninja

Ninja Warriors

Chrono Trigger

We're kickin' it 80's style baby!

Nintendo - Sega - Atari - Turbo GrafX - Commodore - Articles - Reviews - Interviews - Emulation

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Old Skool Games Is:

Zachary Bartels
- Editor in Chief
- PDF Management & Production

Eric Ladd
- Writer

With Contributions By:

David K

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Old Skool Games - Issue Number 1 - March 2004

It's dead, Jim

A serious look at the future of Old Skool Games

Editorial By: *Zachary Bartels*

Some of you are probably wondering what I'm going to be bitching about now, but needless to say, you won't have to wait long to get your answer. It's been many years now since the inception of OSG, it has survived many incarnations up to and including this fancily put together magazine look-alike file. During the course of OSG's life I have received numerous e-mails from people, stating how great the think the idea is, how the reviews and what we cover are pretty cool, and thus I was left with the impression that I was doing the public a service. To a large extent, I still feel I am doing a service, however there is one sad realization that has slowly been creeping into the life-force of OSG. No one gives a shit. Nobody cares; oh sure everyone loves to download, infact with each new release the bandwidth goes higher and higher on the usage chart. People are indeed reading, but at what point beyond that does the general public feel involved?

I am an idealist, there is no doubt about that. OSG was born out of the passion of a momentary thought, spurred by a nearly completely unrelated subject I was discussing with someone I knew from the UK. Great things come at odd times, in odd forms, just like the old "paper napkin" business deal or what have you. However much like with the Emulation community, I made the mistake of assuming a lot of people would be interested in playing and writing about old games. Games that people who are a mere two years younger than folks my age, just couldn't and would never appreciate; even if they grew up with you in the same house, playing the same games. I love the fact that thousands of people download new issues of Old Skool Games, and a few hundred others download various other issues over the course of a month. I love the fact that people are interested in old games, and I think it's great that they think highly enough about OSG to download and read the work we do. But at what point does the relationship falter? Old Skool Games is not a commercial enterprise. We don't have a publishing company selling subscriptions in paperback, we don't have the backing of anyone whatsoever in the gaming or publishing industry, and we certainly do not make a single penny off the magazine or web site. In fact I've stooped so far as to run banners and buttons, recently, just to try and keep things going. Frankly that didn't work much either so I'm ending that as well.

Look guys, you like to download and read and I love you for it. But none of you want to give back - none of you want to write for Old Skool Games. Why? What's the deal with that? Surely there are many of you out there who have opinions on games you grew up playing; be they bad or good. Surely there are some talented writers out there who can do a decent job? Yeah, I know I am strict about the whole english language deal, and grammar and spelling,

but that is simple quality control here folks. The rules are in place for a reason. To protect the readers. Do people just not care enough to write about games, much like everyone who wants emulators and roms but doesn't want to stop and help out? I'm not calling my readers free loaders or anything like that, I'm just asking - where is the support? Where is the community? Thousands of downloads a month and no one asks themselves if they have what it takes to contribute to the magazine?

If you're scared of being rejected, well I understand. I've delt with rejection my whole life, in my different fields of service and in daily life. Sometimes you just have to bite the bullet and take a chance, submit your work. No, we can't pay you for anything. This isn't about money. No, we can't give you ROMS. We support emulation, but we don't want to see ourselves shut down for enabling an offense against the law in the USA. I've tried to keep a reasonable publishing schedule, but I am finding it to be rediculous that we cannot generate even enough content to put out one issue every three months. It's just me and Eric right now, and two people cannot do this for such a long time on their own. I'm burned out (I've been burned out for over two years), Eric is getting burned out and discouraged because no one seems interested in helping either. I've had some "temporary" help as the months have gone by, various writers who appear and dissappear just as fast. Say they are "back" but go dead silent. I can't run a magazine with that kind of staff. In fact, I can't run a magazine AND write all of its content; that is just too unbelievable a demand, especially now that I am working a part time job that pays peanuts and feels like a full time job.

Hell, this issue was supposed to be released back in July - JULY! It's now February 2007, almost a full year past deadline. Well, that's what happens when you can't generate suitable content. People who were supposed to keep in contact with you, such as subjects of articles and interviews and other things related to the technicalities of it all - they just up and stop talking. I got off GoDaddy after the server crash that forced me there, after being there for a couple of weeks, or a month, or whatever it was... I just prepaid for a year of hosting for OSG back on Lunarpages, where we were sitting pretty a few years back for a while before having to move again due to lack of funds. But what did I prepay a year for - to watch my project die? To keep downloads up to something that will be gone next year? I don't know. I feel like I want my $95 back. I could have bought a new amp for my car or something with that money, and it would have been totally self gratifying, and no one would have to care, because it would be my amp, and my music sounding great. Nothing to do with anything for other folks to enjoy. Just me, and a passenger from time to time.

That's how I feel I suppose. I don't know what the future of OSG is going to be. All I know is we lack dedicated, talented reviewers and we need some. It's not always about games either folks. I would love to publish technical articles on how to do all kinds of stuff with your old skool

hardware. Whether it is making a portable NES, or adding composite video to an SNES. Overclocking your Genesis? Who knows? Articles on programming tools, the people who are using them to make kick ass home-made games? The possibilities and fields of interest are mind-blowingly diverse when it comes to retro gaming.

I don't know where OSG will be one month from now, or three months, or next year. All I know is we seem to be popular enough reading. So take a chance in your spare time, and see if you have what it takes to become a contributor, or staffer. See if you can give back to the community and relive some of your best childhood moments at the same time. Don't let OSG die, because we are unique. If you seriously want to contribute and know you are capable of being a good, objective journalist, then get in touch with us. Read the submission rules on the web site. DO SOMETHING. I don't want to hear from people seeking money, I have none to give you. If you cannot write clearly in english, please do not submit work. We don't have time to rewrite other peoples work for them.

Don't e-mail us telling us you will only review games from X country. If you prefer to review sports games, or shooters, or chess games, or something like that, then we are flexible and accomodating, as long as you remain unbiased within your field. If you want to review translated ROMS, then we can discuss implimenting a permanent section for that purpose. If you have other ideas for types of games to review, give us a hollar.

In closing, thanks to Eric Ladd. He's been there since practically the beginning. He's helped out lots behind the scenes and as a writer. We need more good people like him. Once again, don't let OSG die. Take the initiative and truly make this a magazine for retro-gamers, BY retro-gamers.

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Crossbow

Review by: *David K*

I have always enjoyed light gun games. Exactly why they never really had much success on consoles and home computers is still something of a mystery to me, since there aren't a lot of things that beat the feeling of shooting objects on-screen with a real gun. "Crossbow" in the arcades was actually one of the very first games to utilize this technology, of course using a crossbow instead of a gun, but I guess the title of the game should have already given that away. Now I wasn't really expecting the Atari 2600 conversion to be using a light gun when I bought it twenty years ago, but all the same it turned out that even without that peripheral, "Crossbow" remains a somewhat decent, if not badly aged game.
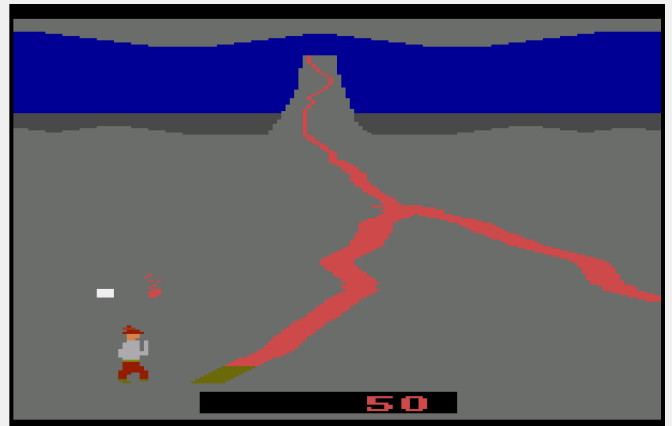
The story, as with most games of that era, remains pretty vague. Apparently you and five friends set out to retrieve some treasures stolen by "The Evil Master". Your friends are unarmed but you carry a crossbow, with which you can use to save your companions from attacking ants, scorpions and many other horrible things. You just have to wonder, what exactly does that make your companions? Did you just hire them merely as cannon fodder while you bravely lead from the back? Or is it some sort of standard custom for questing adventurers back in the day to leave their weapons at home? After all, I remember all too well our brave Sir Gallaheart from our "Firelord" review, who had pretty much the same kind of preparation for his journey that you and your party have in "Crossbow".

Anyway, the aim of the game is simple, shoot anything that moves or tries to attack your friends on their way to "The Evil Master's Castle." This is done in a variety of zones, like for example a desert and caverns. You start out with two friends, and you can gain additional friends by safely making it across these areas. This, however, works only the first time you cross each zone, and you can only have a maximum of four people on your team (which is somewhat inconsistent with the story in the manual).

Of course it comes as no surprise that the Atari 2600 version of "Crossbow" is horribly stripped down from its Arcade counterpart. Gone are the intro screens, sound, and most of the fancy graphics that it had. No longer do your friends have an individual look to them (in the arcade you had for example a dwarf and a warrior, among others), on the Atari they all look like exactly the same sprite, just with different colored pants. For what it's worth though, the programmers obviously tried to cram as much as possible into the cartridge, and they still succeed pretty decently at it too. Even though it all looks a lot more bland, you still clearly recognize in what area you are, and the variety of attacking animals and enemies. The fact that you were able to choose your paths upon completion of a zone by shooting at red and green buttons at the bottom of the screen was quite innovative in it's day. It at least made you feel as if you had slightly more participation in the adventures of your fellowship than with most light gun shooters of that era, and thus it is great that they managed to retain it for the Atari version. The main problem with "Crossbow" however, are its controls. A joystick is only a very crude replacement for a light gun and it shows. It takes quite a while before you get accustomed to aiming your cross-hair with your stick, and many players will probably have already given up out of sheer frustration by the time they properly get the hang of it. It's pretty much the same problem that a lot of other light gun conversions, "Operation Wolf" for example, had in years to come on various platforms, and only really got solved with the introduction of a mouse. It's also a shame to know that there was actually a light gun available for the Atari 2600, but it never got the support it needed.

So in the end I really can't recommend "Crossbow" for the Atari all that much. If you ever owned the cartridge and have a sudden rush of nostalgia for it, this is of course a welcome trip back down memory lane... But the problem is that in this day and age there are similar and far better games to be found on a variety of platforms. If you really have to play it, choose the vastly superior Atari 7800 version instead, or even better, go out and check if there is still an actual arcade cabinet around somewhere and pump some quarters into that!

Megamania

Review by: David K

Playing "Megamania" sure brings back memories. This was actually the very first console game that I ever owned and thus counts as one of the main reasons why video gaming turned into such a huge obsession for me over the years. Had it not been for my parents giving me that spanking new Atari 2600 and a copy of "Megamania" (and "Pac-Man Jr.") at the age of six, my life could have looked very different than it does now. Was "Megamania" that good of a game then? Maybe not, maybe nostalgia gets the better of me in this case, but even so, the fact that I still play it on regular occasion and that I actually prefer it over similar games that received the "classic" tag over the years, like "Space Invaders" for example, does speak to it's benefit.
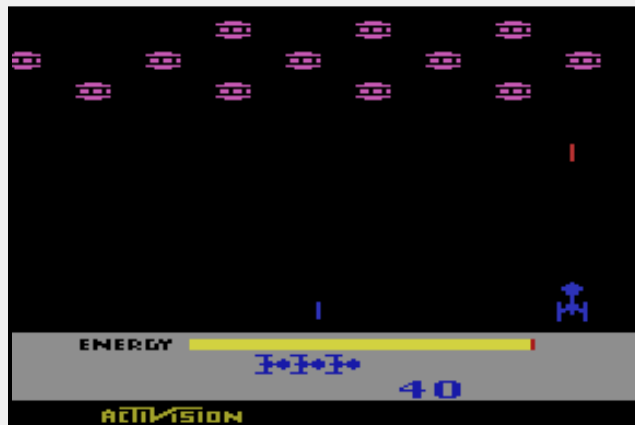
Just like "Space Invaders" or "Galaxians", "Megamania" is charming in its simplicity. You control a small space ship / gun at the bottom of the screen and have to fend off wave upon wave of attackers. Once you clear a wave, you move on to the next more difficult one, and continue until you eventually run out of lives. The one thing that actually makes "Megamania" slightly different from both of the aforementioned games is that instead of shooting alien invaders, you get to take potshots at objects that are straight out of everyday life, like hamburgers or dice. Not that you would actually be able to tell this from simply playing the game however. In fact I didn't find out about this until years later, when my English was sufficient enough to read the manual. Up until that point I still believed that I was shooting aliens in rather odd shaped ships, and you can blame all that on the very limited graphic capabilities of the Atari 2600. Still, for a game of its day and age, the graphics in "Megamania" hold up pretty decently, with large, colorful sprites for both your enemies as well as your own ship. They might be very sparse and basic, but they still do the trick without a doubt.

So what exactly was it that made me come back to "Megamania" over and over again, even though I never really had much love for "Space Invaders"? The answer is simple. Variety and a lot of charm. Even though graphics were simple, the attackers all looked and behaved very distinctively. Instead of just scrolling from left to right over the screen and back, every wave had its own attack patterns. So while some of your enemies might have been content to just move alongside the top of the battle area while occasionally shooting at you, others used slightly more complicated routines, such as rapidly zig-zagging and then stopping for a short while. Also, in contrast to "Space Invaders", when the enemy reaches the bottom of the screen it doesn't necessarily mean the end of the game, as they simply reappear at the top of the screen again. What does signal the end of your life however, is the energy bar at the bottom of the screen, which gradually decreases as time goes by. When it hits zero you lose a life, so the trick is to shoot everything in sight before this happens. Once you finally manage to get through all eight waves of attackers, the game starts over, with the same shapes, but differently colored enemies who slightly differ in attack patterns.

Couple all these things with the fact that you have two different difficulty settings (one which has guided missiles, the other without), and you can imagine that "Megamania" is a lot more fun than "Space Invaders" and the horde of clones that it spawned. It might not be marked as a classic, but it's definitely worth playing if you have a few minutes to spare now and again.

Bad Dudes Vs Dragon Ninja

Review by: *David K*

When I was about eight or nine years old the main requisite for me to play a game was that it had to have Ninjas in it. It didn't matter if they were the good guys or the bad guys, but any game that used them was assured of my attention. Luckily, if there is one thing that the eighties didn't lack, it was Ninjas. They were literally everywhere, from movies to games and even television shows. You can imagine my joy when one day I stumbled upon the "Bad Dudes Vs Dragon Ninja" game in one of our local arcade galleries. It had Ninjas in spades, and at that point in time I honestly thought that it was one of the coolest games ever designed. On replaying it about fifteen years later that opinion has somewhat changed though.

It seems that "Bad Dudes" has acquired some sort of cult status over time. Not because of its brilliant gameplay or captivating story, but more so because of the amount of cheesiness that it has on display. Admittedly, the story that once seemed extremely cool, doesn't exactly make a lot of sense fifteen years later. The intro, in all its one-screen, two-line glory, explains that "Ninja crimes are rampant these days", and "White House is not the exception". Apparently, President Ronnie (Ronald Reagan in one of his few video game appearances) managed to get himself kidnapped by the Dragon Ninja gang, and of course it's up to you (with the eventual help of a buddy) to get him back.

For anyone who has ever played a side-scrolling beat 'em up in the vein of the legendary "Kung-Fu Master" or "Vigilante", "Bad Dudes" will seem rather familiar. You travel from left to right across a variety of levels, all the while kicking the crap out of anything dumb enough to come your way, occasionally picking up objects like weapons or extra energy that these assailants drop. At the end of each stage a boss awaits, who is just that little bit bigger (or smaller, in the case of the second level Ninja-midget-with-claws), meaner and tougher than the rest of them - or at least should be in theory; because in all fairness the bosses hardly posed a challenge to me, and most of them were defeated by simply doing the same standing kick over and over again. Which brings me to one of the first short-comings of the game, the lack of available moves.

I'm not sure what it is that earned you the title of "Bad Dude", and why exactly you are picked to perform this mission, but it surely isn't your martial-arts prowess or lightning-quick abilities. A kick, a punch, and a pathetic attempt at a flying/spinning kick are about all that your character knows. To add insult to injury, they are all performed at equally shoddy speed, which can be a pain in the ass when the screen is swamped with enemies. Trust me, this happens a lot! The favorite tactic of the standard enemy Ninjas involves swamping their prey en-masse from all sides in the hope of getting a punch or kick through. Luckily there are a few other types of foes, such as sword-wielding Ninjas, female Ninjas, and dogs to spice things up a little, but overall I wish that the designers had spent a bit more time on enemy behavior. As it is, the game is simply too limited and easy, lacking the ability to entertain for a longer period of time, and even the inclusion of a co-op two player mode doesn't change that. In fact, it makes it worse since you can beat it twice as fast when playing with a friend.

But like said, you won't remember "Bad Dudes" for its gameplay, but mainly for its cheesiness. The "mission briefing" which appears after you hit start made my mate sneer out loud. After all it's not everyday that you get briefed by a buffed-up Marine asking you if you are a "bad enough dude" for the mission. Whatever happened to

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sending in the pros I wonder? Then there are the characters in the game itself. While the graphics are certainly decent enough, with large colorful sprites, who are reasonably well animated, I can't help but think that your dude looks more fat than muscular. This in combination with some of the enemy bosses, like the infamous midget Ninja; and the fire-spitting fat bloke is on occasion, quite hilarious to behold. Then there is the ending, which is absolutely the funniest thing I have yet seen in any kind of game. After putting your ass on the line and kicking seven shades of sushi out of a seemingly endless army of Ninjas, you are treated to a wonderful shot of President Ronnie, as he kindly invites you for... a burger?! This could have been one of the texts on those dreadfully unfunny T-shirts you sometimes come across on the street - "I saved my country and all I got was a lousy burger". Great incentive to be a hero!

But still, I can't say that I actually disliked "Bad Dudes Vs Dragon Ninja". The game has the typical kind of cheesy charm that so many things from the eighties have, and manages to entertain, if only for a while. Switch your mind off, enjoy the action, and don't think about it too much and you'll still have some fun, even though you will hardly remember what it was you played afterward.

Robby Roto

Review by: Eric Ladd

I wanted to try something new that I had never played before, and the power of the Internet led me to an arcade game called "Robby Roto". Following the success of "Pac-Man", many maze games were released in the early eighties. I figured that was the inspiration for this game, but the similarities end there, as "Robby Roto" offers a pretty unique challenge.
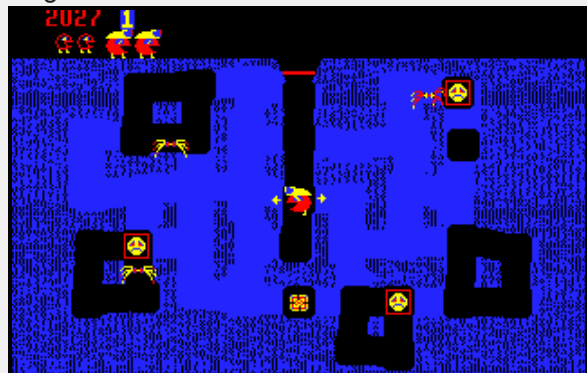
I don't guess there's a story going on here, but it wouldn't matter anyway since I can sum the game up in one sentence. Dig through the tunnels to get the hostages and unlock the escape route while avoiding the enemies. It may sound simple with such a short description, but the game gets tough in a hurry. In each level, there are three hostages to save, and a key to grab before you can escape. Hostages trail behind you when touched, and all three can follow at once. In fact, if you escape with multiple hostages at the same time, you get bonus points.

Not so fast, though, because the spiders, goblin things, and giant mouths are after you and want the hostages back. If any enemies touch you, obviously you die, but if they just touch the hostages, they'll carry them back to another place. It's worth noting that each time you successfully take a hostage out of the tunnels, the monsters will re-scatter, so sometimes it's strategically worth it to forego the multiple rescue bonus and get the enemies off your tail. I can't count how many times I died because I got greedy and tried to stay in the tunnels until I had all three hostages together.

The levels themselves don't make things any easier. You start with very few, if any, tunnels dug already. As you move around the screen, arrows will tell you when a tunnel can be made in a direction. In the earlier levels, the background "dirt" is a much different shade than where the tunnels can go, so it's pretty easy to see all the possible paths. However, as the

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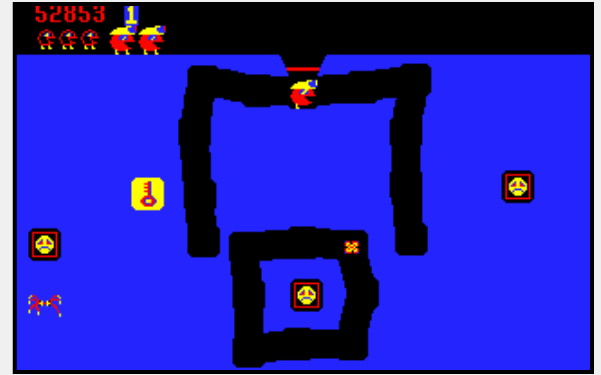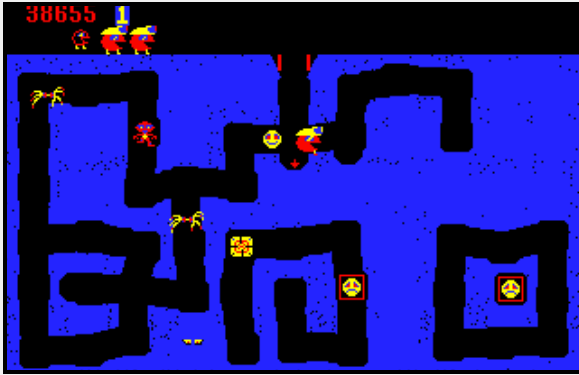
levels go on, the tunnel and background colors get closer to each other until they are the same, making the arrows the only way to know where you can dig. This makes the game much more challenging, because unless you have the levels memorized, it's an exercise in reaction time, as you must keep up with monsters chasing you and the arrows popping up to show escape routes. It's very easy to get cornered when you're unsure of where all you can go, and it may seem frustrating if you don't like to lose.

You aren't entirely helpless moving through the tunnels, though. Once per level you can press the only button to become invincible for a short time. While invincible, you can run through enemies, and even take back hostages they are carrying. Eventually you can find a way to use this more than once per level. Too often in maze games I find myself able to just camp out on opposite sides of the map, away from the enemies, and given so much time to react, I find that they get easy, boring, or both. "Robby Roto" avoids such a fate due to the limited layout of the tunnels and the strategy this brings out. It's my favorite thing about the game, because it forces you to be more careful with your movements and your only defense, the temporary invincibility button. The game does get incredibly tough as you move along, and it kicks my ass on a regular basis, but never to the point of being unfair and making me lose interest. Don't go in expecting a technical marvel, but the gameplay is solid and pretty creative, and I recommend it.

Basketball Sam & Ed

Review by: *Eric Ladd*

Last semester in the senior design lab, my team wasted a lot more time than we should have. Long story short, when you get four computer science nerds together, stories of old video games are going to fly, with one such day leading to talk of the C64 and a game called "Basketball Sam & Ed".

In this game, each player is a living basketball, with arms, legs and a face. You each run back and forth on a court with three hoops, with the object being to shoot through them and score points. Yeah, you have a jump button, but obviously it's not that easy. You can't jump high enough to score yourself, so you have to rely on bouncing off of your opponent. This is the part where anyone who has ever played a competitive video game says, "OH I SEE", and realizes the human element that such a game needs to be successful.

Since I feel obligated to mention it, this game was featured in Compute! Magazine as a code segment the reader could type in and run. Given that, I think the best way to describe the end result is "good enough". OK, so the colors are fugly, and the sound is almost nonexistent, but the graphics do what they need to (give you two balls bouncing around), and if you're anything like us, you'll be too caught up in the competition, probably talking or yelling at each other, to hear anything anyway. This is exactly the kind of game where a solid gameplay design can overcome the technical shortcomings.

Now I'll get to the most important thing: this game is made for two players. Sure, there's a one player mode where you take on the computer, but that gets old pretty fast, and doesn't offer the same reward that two player competition can. Let me try to explain. Do you want to run straight for your opponent, jump off his forehead at the last minute, and hope to catch the right angle to score? Go ahead and try it, but know that when you miss, you're left bouncing for a short time in which your opponent can try to bounce off you for a better shot. Are you in the lead, and worried your opponent will tie it up? Wait until he is bouncing, then get under him and keep him stuck in the air for as long as you can, but expect to get punched and/or hit with a controller in the process.

In this game that relies on action and reaction, and can depend wholly on who makes the first move, playing with another person brings a level of fun to it that was rewarding to us way longer than we expected. The computer doesn't make the same spontaneous decision that make a game like this good. Find a good buddy and stick to the two player mode, and I think you'll have a good time.

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Ken Griffey Jr. Presents Major League Baseball

Review by: *Eric Ladd*

I decided the other day that I wanted to play a season mode on a sports game, and being the cheapskate that I am, I went to my old games shelf to see what was collecting dust. I came across "Ken Griffey Jr. Presents Major League Baseball", for the SNES. So my mind was made up, I chose Oakland, which was my favorite team when I was little and cared about baseball and thought Jose Canseco was the shit, and was off to play my season.

When first starting off, the game interface allows you to get to everything: your schedule, standings, team info, etc. It's not really the smoothest navigation in the world, but it's not bad either. You can choose from season mode, single games, or one of the special events, which are World Series, All-star game, and Home Run Derby. Anyway, I jumped right in to the meat of the game, and started the first day of my schedule.

For the most part, everything looks and sounds pretty good. The field and stadiums are colorful, and the semi-cartoonish characters look and move well. The sounds are nice, with a decent crowd and good effects for things like hitting and catching the ball. The only downside here is the music, which is tolerable but repetitive during the game, and pretty annoying out on the menus. I definitely recommend turning off the music as soon as you turn the game on.

Another downside here, although probably only for bigger baseball fans, is the lack of real player names. All the real major league teams and parks are in place, but the players all have fake names. A slightly redeeming factor is that many of the teams have creative or related names, such as all of one team being famous musicians. Additionally, if you have the interest and a lot of spare time, the game gives you the ability to manually rename any or all players to whatever you want.

As far as the actual gameplay goes, everything here is very simple and there is practically no learning curve. Both throwing and hitting are as easy as pressing a single button, and the option is there to even have the computer do all of the fielding for you. You can control this yourself instead, and add things like jumping or diving for a ball. Even doing the fielding manually, though, doesn't seem to add much variety or challenge, and that's the biggest downfall of the game.

After playing fifteen games out of my one hundred and sixty-two game season, I just didn't feel like it had a point anymore. Hitting seemed to have no skill involved, and just required the press of a button. Pitching skillfully seemed like a waste of time, since no matter what kind of crazy curving pitch I threw the computer still hit it ninety-nine percent of the time. Fielding was just a matter of getting lucky enough to have the ball go in the direction of a fielder, and thanks to the huge radius of hit detection, catching balls was really easy too. The best way to sum it up is that it felt like I was just pushing buttons to see what happens, but not actually controlling what happens.

Of the other modes, the only one remotely unique or worth mentioning is the Home Run Derby. Basically you choose a power hitter from a list of three and try to smack as many homers as you can. Unfortunately, the lack of a worthwhile pitching/hitting system shows its face again, and this mode becomes nothing but a B-button fest. The only difference is instead of hoping the ball avoids
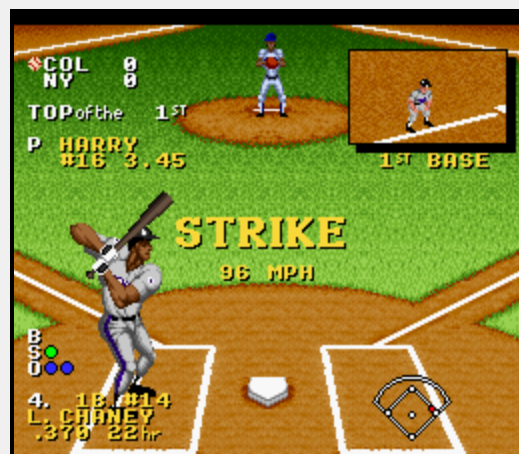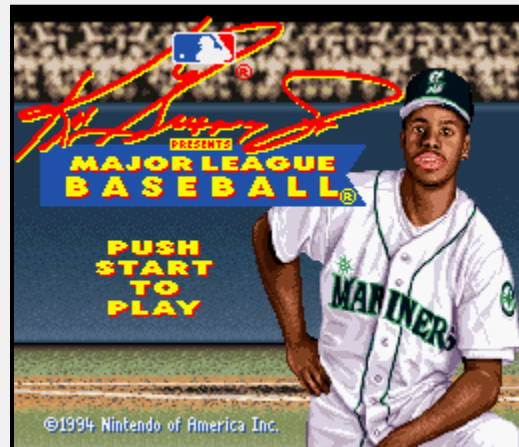
a person, now you hope it goes over a wall. It seems just as random as the rest of the hitting on the game, and will leave you wondering what makes one hit a grounder and the next one go five-hundred feet, when you are doing the same thing every time. The mode can be fun for a bit, but it got old pretty soon due to its limited nature.

I understand that my complaints about the luck involved in fielding are kind of the nature of baseball, but the simpleness and ease, especially of hitting and pitching, ruined this game for me. Overall, it seems there is nothing to challenge a competent gamer, and nothing in the game that allows, or requires, you to get better at anything. However, I did only play against the computer, and I see the potential for more fun to be had with two human players instead. No guarantees, though, since the simple mechanics and simple hitting/catching are still in place. Unless you're a fanatic that likes anything to do with baseball, then I say stay away from this one, because I honestly don't see anything here to keep someone coming back.

Chrono Trigger

Review by: Zachary Bartels

Chrono Trigger is one of the most celebrated role-playing games for the Super NES, and with good reason. It tackles elements of SciFi rarely seen in video games (even today), and even RPGs in general. First would be the modern day, technological setting. Although somewhat more commonplace in today's mainstream gaming circles, this brand of RPG was a very seldom occurrence back in the days of the SNES; and what's more, "Chrono Trigger" revolves around a secondary powerhouse of a plot device - time travel. Following the exploits of a young man named Crono, the game is a brilliant mesh of all aspect of game production. It has a unique art style of its own, with many unique character sprites (even the generics looked good), unique music and personal anthems, and a simplistic control system that integrated real-time exploration with battles effortlessly.

Do yourself a favor and let the title screen roll on by, without pressing any buttons. You will be rewarded with a cinematic sequence that showcases a few locations in the game, as well as setting you up to watch a few of the games Hero's in action. One thing to take note of is the seamless entry of the battle screen, as I noted earlier, it reflects what you will experience in the game exactly. One of the first things the game asks you to do when you start a new file is to choose your battle-mode; Active or Wait. The terms are pretty self explanatory. Active means that the game won't give you a chance to rest during battles; once an enemy time gauge has progressed to full, it takes immediate action. This can be overwhelming at first, but once you get the hang of making split-second decisions in battle after battle, it will come as second nature to you.   The Wait option, naturally makes an enemy wait their turn. Everyone charges up their time gauge, and a sort of loose "first come, first serve" chain of progression is formed for all parties involved in a battle.

One of the coolest things I like about "Chrono Trigger", that I have not seen in another game for a very long time (Breath of Fire III comes to mind), is the seamless battle system. You are constantly in a state of exploration when navigating the game, be it in a town or other area/dungeon system, or the world map. Unlike a lot of games, you do not fight on the world map, and when not on the world map you are always open to attack. Many areas of the game are fully explorable, and enemies are sometimes hiding in tricky spots, waiting for you to walk by and set off their trap. After an audible cue and a brief pause, the battle menu and appropriate battle gauges will flow onto the screen, and the fight can begin! Then as fast as it started, the fight will end, the menus and gauges retreating back into nothingness.

"Chrono Trigger" is an easy game by design, and is all about getting the player to enjoy the game, with as little worrying about the mechanics of the situation as possible. One area where the game shines is the simplicity of its menus. They are well organized, easy to read, options are easy to edit, and there is little room for confusion. The only drawback thus far is the sorting option for the Items menu; there are no real options, only a hard-coded sort order, meant to override your custom placement when selected to do so.

The default menu that comes up when you press the menu button lists the three characters currently in your party. Further exploring that menu allows you to select individual characters, and adjust their equipped items. From here you can do all the basics, such as swapping out weapons, armor, and accessory items, as well as checking on the general health of your character. As an extension of these equipment status menus, you can see what effects equipment will have on your characters, before you buy them from a shop menu.

Beyond that is the TEC menu. The TEC lists all the techniques that your characters know. You have access to all three branches of the TEC menu from here, showing you different level TECs depending on which menu you level you choose. For the most basic TECs you will see the skill, and a description of what it does, if you move the cursor over that skill. Also note that your character sprite is visible; as you move on the more advanced TECs, you will begin to see combinations of character sprites represented at once. This is the games way of telling you that a particular TEC requires both of those characters to trigger the TEC, and usually either of the characters should have the ability listed in their individual TEC menu during battle. Beyond that is the standard options menu, which helps to control a lot of customization of the game. You can select many things, including your battle-mode (Active/Wait), battle speed, message speed, menu window colors, controller button mapping, and so on.

"Chrono Trigger" boasts an impressive soundtrack, just like many games from its era. Combined with some of the games more powerful visuals, I'd say that "Chrono Trigger's" soundtrack lends itself to the game so well, as to be one of the best soundtracks of all time. Of course, many people would disagree, and cite their own list of games, but I just consider myself lucky to live in a time where game music has progressed to the point where we can even hold these kinds of debates with serious intent. There is no shortage of memorable tunes throughout the game, from the Millennial Fair to the Undersea Palace, Frog's Theme to Zeal Palace to the plain old humdrum of the standard battle theme; no matter what your poison, there are at least five different song in "Chrono Trigger" you just can't resist listening to over and over.

I've tried my best to steer away from plot specific events, names of characters, locations visited, and general story related information, and with good reason. The enjoyment of the story is ultimately up to the user; my job is simply to convince you that the technical capabilities to enjoy that story are all in place, and in top form. I recommend everyone play "Chrono Trigger" at least once in their lifetime, so that they will know what it truly means to dream of going on an epic adventure to save the world.

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The Ninja Warriors

Review by: Zachary Bartels

I have to admit that I am kind of cheating when it comes to "The Ninja Warriors." I originally played this game, and wrote a lot of its review, many months ago. I haven't really played it since, either. Not that I found it to be a bad game in particular, I just never got around to finishing the review and publishing it, and the game got old after a while (I beat it the first run).

The story of the game is that the world is ruled by a tyrannical dictator, and the rebels are trying to stop him. Little ever goes to plan in video games, and "The Ninja Warriors" is no exception to this rule. The dictator has learned of the rebels' plans to use Ninja Warriors to defeat him, so he decides to launch a pre-emptive strike to take out the Ninjas before they are truly ready!

The game has three playable Ninjas, each consisting of their own strengths and weaknesses for you to deploy where appropriate. The first Ninja, aptly named "Ninja", is a big brute. He can't really jump at all, but he can pick up and lay a smack-down on almost any enemy he comes across. He can even pick up and throw down boss characters - yeah! The second is named Kunoichi; a fairly agile Ninja who is a great jumper. She has some pretty cool moves if you can learn them, and one of her signatures is jumping from bad guy to bad buy, killing off each one as she goes; never touching the ground. The third, Kamaitachi, is a full blown Ninja looking robot who makes no apologies. I'm not sure exactly how strong it's supposed to be, but I know it is pretty quick. It specializes in making its way up to the enemy, then hitting it with a furry of speedy attacks.

All the Ninjas in the game pretty much share the same basic attack moves, which consists of mashing the buttons together in a rushed feeling combo (think desperation in a fighting game). If you feel elite enough, you might even try a jump-kick, or perhaps a special attack, which sadly enough is generic also. You have a power meter that fills up, allowing you to execute the attack, in case you were still wondering.

As noted before, the game is pretty generic, but I'll give them some credit for the environment and background details. You really feel like you are progressing and not just seeing the same thing over and over again. About the most challenging the game seems to get is learning to deal with certain enemies; you may be better served with an assault from the rear (attack from behind), and that kind of stuff. I found bosses to be surprisingly bland in both ferocity, and difficulty. It's like fighting a regular enemy with extra HP to be honest, granted there are small variations and special attacks. I'm not really sure what else to say, to be honest. There was nothing too great about this one, but its not totally boring either. I think its a solid game for its day, and definitely outshines its arcade cousin. Plus it has great music.